

Winter months mean training and summer preparation

by Bill Kent

Those of us on the Visitor Services staff at Kenai Refuge stay busy through the winter even though the throngs of visitors are not around as in July. This is the time of year we tackle the never-ending paperwork that is part and parcel of working for the government, attend training courses, and continue with the ever-present preparations for our summer programs.

At times, it would seem there is a specific office somewhere in Washington, D.C., whose sole purpose is generating reporting requirements. Although I am sure each of these reports fulfills an important accountability function, there are times when you just have to wonder... how many times can you count the number of vehicles, boats, toilets, or other pieces of equipment? Is there someone back there on the east coast who thinks we lost a toilet, or misplaced the grader during the past year? I can assure them (and you) that we would let someone know if either of those incidents occurred. My guess is, because we are funded by Congress, these reports are probably used to reassure our elected representatives that we are actually using the equipment purchased with those appropriated funds.

The winter months are also when we complete a great deal of mandatory training in such areas as supervision, pilot accreditation, law enforcement, first-aid and CPR refresher, aircraft safety, interpretation, and education outreach. Personally, I am a firm believer in training in order to keep employees' skills and enthusiasm at a high level, both for the employees' benefit and our visitors. It is the policy at Kenai Refuge that each year, everyone gets one training opportunity which helps them professionally; this is in addition to whatever mandatory training is scheduled. Some of the training opportunities my staff has taken advantage of over the past years are interpretation skills development, wilderness stewardship, various law enforcement skills development courses, environmental education curriculum development, training for qualification as an aircraft safety instructor, and other disciplines. By attending these various types of training, we are better able to deliver better quality visitor

services to you and others and to make a visit to Kenai Refuge a safe and enjoyable experience. We also use this time to review the training we provide to our seasonal employees so they are prepared to assist you when you visit the Refuge this summer.

A great deal of our time in the winter is used to prepare for the upcoming "busy season." Currently, one of the projects we are busy with is working with a contractor to develop and produce interpretive and information signing for the new visitor facilities at Moose Range Meadows, along the south bank of the Kenai River on Keystone Drive. We plan on having information there regarding riverbank protection, visitor safety, sockeye fishing techniques and other topics. Our law enforcement staff continue their patrols throughout the winter, checking on fishermen, trappers, and other Refuge users to insure compliance with laws and regulation and to assist visitors who may need help with one problem or another. Another task is reviewing and selecting volunteer applications sent to us by the Student Conservation Association for positions assisting us with spring/summer/fall visitor services and environmental education programs. One of the bigger projects this year is planning the celebration of the 60th anniversary of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge; President Franklin Roosevelt signed the order to create the Kenai National Moose Range on December 16th, 1941. (With everything else on his mind at that time, I am amazed he took the time to take that action.) We will be providing more information on this celebration in future *Refuge Notebook* articles and other means in the coming months.

All in all, this time of year means we remain busy because the work doesn't take the winter off... it just takes on a different face.

Bill Kent is the Supervisory Park Ranger at Kenai NWR. He and his wife and daughter recently moved to Sterling after living in Soldotna for nine years. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.